

# UPDATE

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## **Be Knowledgeable about Nonprescription Drugs**

American medicine cabinets contain a growing choice of nonprescription, over-the-counter (OTC) medicines to treat an expanding range of ailments. OTC medicines often do more than relieve aches, pains and itches. Some can prevent diseases like tooth decay, cure diseases like athlete's foot and, with a doctor's guidance, help manage recurring conditions like vaginitis and the minor pain of arthritis.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) determines whether medicines are prescription or nonprescription. The term prescription (Rx) refers to medicines that are safe and effective when used under a doctor's order. Nonprescription (OTC) drugs are medicines FDA decides are safe and effective for use without a doctor's prescription.

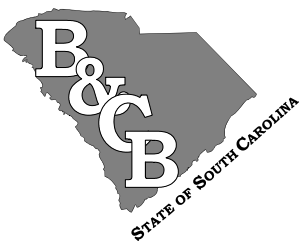
The FDA also decides when a prescription drug is safe enough to be sold directly to consumers over-the-counter. The regulatory process allowing Americans to take a more active role in their health care is known as Rx-to-OTC switch. As a result of this process, more than 600 products sold over the counter today use ingredients or dosage strengths available only by prescription 20 years ago.

Increased access to OTC medicines is especially important for our maturing population. Two out of three older Americans rate their health as excellent to good but four out of five report at least one chronic condition. The fact is, today's nonprescription medicines offer greater opportunity to treat more of the aches and illnesses most likely to appear in our later years. As we live longer, work longer and take a more active role in our own health care, the need to become better informed about self-care grows.

### **Tips**

1. Ask your pharmacist questions concerning medication.
2. Read package and inside directions carefully and completely.
3. Discard medication that is over a year old.

For more information about OTC contact the FDA at 1-888-463-6332.



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